

The Gospel  
Focus of

*Steven J. Lawson*

# CHARLES SPURGEON

A LONG LINE of GODLY MEN



“Steve Lawson, a great preacher in his own right, has emerged as our generation’s finest biographer of great preachers. His works on John Calvin and Jonathan Edwards are both masterpieces. Steve has a knack for pointing out and explaining the outstanding traits that made each of these unique preachers truly important and influential. This work on Charles Spurgeon is likewise brilliant, highlighting Spurgeon’s Calvinistic convictions alongside his evangelistic zeal—showing why those two characteristics are perfectly harmonious and equally essential characteristics of any truly biblical ministry. A riveting work, this book will fuel your enthusiasm for both sound doctrine and earnest evangelism.”

—DR. JOHN MACARTHUR  
Pastor-teacher, Grace Community Church  
Sun Valley, Calif.

“Charles Spurgeon was a model pastor-theologian. His theology came to life in his plea for sinners to be reconciled to God. Lawson points us to the necessity of a theology fueled by fervor for evangelism in this excellent primer on the prince of preachers.”

—DR. ED STETZER  
Billy Graham Distinguished Chair  
of Church, Mission, and Evangelism  
Wheaton College, Wheaton, Ill.

“I own at least three dozen different biographies of the prince of preachers, but Steve Lawson’s new book on Charles Spurgeon will from now on have a key place of prominence in my short list of favorites. Dr. Lawson understands what made the great preacher’s heart beat: it was the gospel, charged with a passion for the souls of lost

people and kept steady by the doctrines of grace. The clear rhythm of that pulse reverberates through this book, and it's a catchy beat. I'm profoundly glad for that, and I hope countless readers will be moved to get in step with the cadence."

—PHIL JOHNSON  
Executive director, Grace to You  
Curator, The Spurgeon Archive

"Steve Lawson provides a succinct and captivating analysis of the heart of one of the greatest preachers of all time. Spurgeon's ministry is legendary, but what animated and motivated his life and ministry is often overlooked. With ample extracts from Spurgeon's own writings and sermons, this book reveals how the gospel of Jesus Christ provided both the power and content of his preaching. Far from being a distraction to the gospel, those doctrines that are historically known as Calvinism caused Spurgeon to understand the person and work of Jesus more clearly and preach Christ more passionately. While some who do not hold to Spurgeon's view of the doctrines of grace might wonder how he could be a Calvinist and *yet* be evangelistic, Lawson clearly demonstrates that the prince of preachers was a bold evangelist precisely *because* of his Calvinism. There is much wisdom in this book both for preachers and for those who value preaching."

—DR. THOMAS K. ASCOL  
Senior pastor, Grace Baptist Church  
Cape Coral, Fla.

“For more than thirty-six years, Steve Lawson has had an intense interest in the ministry of Charles Spurgeon. In April 1976, he wrote a paper on Spurgeon’s theological controversies for a Baptist history class at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. In that paper, Lawson said about Spurgeon, ‘He magnified God’s grace and glorified God’s Son.’ Lawson has shown in this book how those traits of Spurgeon’s ministry, plus his thorough commitment to the infallibility of Scripture, his fervent grace-centered evangelism, his utter dependence on the work of the Holy Spirit, and his personal courage, make Spurgeon transcend the ages as a model for church-centered gospel ministry. Every Christian will be encouraged by Lawson’s description of Spurgeon’s life and his analysis of Spurgeon’s driving commitments to the whole counsel of God. Loaded with pungent quotes from Spurgeon and punctuated with helpful and pertinent exhortations from Lawson, this is a book for us all.”

—DR. THOMAS J. NETTLES  
Professor of historical theology (retired)  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary,  
Louisville, Ky.



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Charles Spurgeon

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# The Gospel Focus of Charles Spurgeon

STEVEN J. LAWSON



LIGONIER MINISTRIES



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To Iain H. Murray,  
whose tireless efforts for  
more than a half century  
have introduced Reformed truth  
to a new generation,  
and whose book  
*The Forgotten Spurgeon*  
made a dramatic and lasting impact  
on my life for good



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## Foreword

# Followers Worthy to Be Followed

**D**own through the centuries, God has raised up a long line of godly men, those whom He has mightily used at critical junctures of church history. These valiant individuals have come from all walks of life—from the ivy-covered halls of elite schools to the dusty back rooms of tradesmen’s shops. They have arisen from all points of this world—from highly visible venues in densely populated cities to obscure hamlets in remote places. Yet despite their differences, these pivotal figures, trophies of God’s grace, have had much in common.

Certainly each man possessed stalwart faith in God and the Lord Jesus Christ, but more can be said. Each of them held deep convictions concerning the God-exalting truths known as the doctrines of grace. Though they differed in secondary matters of theology, they stood shoulder to shoulder in championing the doctrines that magnify the sovereign grace of God in His saving purposes in the world. To a man, they upheld the essential truth that “salvation is of the Lord” (Ps. 3:8; Jonah 2:9).

How did these truths affect their lives? Far from paralyzing them, the doctrines of grace inflamed their hearts with reverential awe for God and humbled their souls before His throne. Moreover, the truths

of sovereign grace emboldened these men to further the cause of Christ on the earth. This fact should not surprise us, as history reveals that those who embrace these truths are granted extraordinary confidence in their God. With an enlarged vision of Him, they step forward and accomplish the work of many men, leaving a godly influence on generations to come. They arise with wings like eagles and soar over their times in history. Experientially, the doctrines of grace renew their spirits and empower them to serve God in their divinely appointed hours.

The Long Line of Godly Men Profiles aim to highlight key figures from this procession of sovereign-grace men. It is the purpose of this series to explore how these figures used their God-given gifts and abilities to further the kingdom of heaven. Because they were stalwart followers of Christ, their examples are worthy of emulation today.

In this volume, I want to introduce you to the revered British preacher Charles Haddon Spurgeon. Spurgeon's voice thundered with the truth throughout England and beyond in a day when the church stood in great need of red-hot, straightforward, no-holds-barred gospel preaching—and that of a Calvinistic strand. Despite the theological and methodological declines of his day, Spurgeon was deeply devoted to preaching Christ and Him crucified. As the Lord empowered him, his pulpit became one of the most prolific sounding boards the kingdom of God has ever known. To this day, Spurgeon remains “the Prince of Preachers,” eminently worthy to be profiled in this series.

May the Lord use this book to greatly embolden you, so that, like Spurgeon, you will leave an indelible mark on this world. May you be strengthened with the gospel to walk in a manner worthy of your calling.

*Soli Deo gloria!*

—Steven J. Lawson  
Series editor

## Preface

# Why Spurgeon?

**I**t was more than thirty years ago, as a young seminary student, when I was first confronted with the biblical truth of the sovereignty of God in salvation. To that point, I had viewed salvation as a joint venture between God and man. I assumed that God extends the offer of salvation, but man has the ability to accept or reject it. But unexpectedly, the sovereign grace of God toward those whom He chose in eternity past to save was made known to me. To my amazement, my eyes were opened to behold God as I had never seen Him before.

A thick fog lifted. Suddenly I could see those truths in the Bible known as the doctrines of grace. Astonishingly, they had been there all along. As my eyes raced through the Scriptures, I became absorbed with an endless number of verses teaching the predestining grace of God. For every one verse I saw, there were a hundred more virtually leaping from the pages of God's Word, screaming for my attention. From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible was now declaring, "Salvation is of the Lord."

This discovery was, at first, devastating. I was shaken to the core of my being. My whole orientation to the Bible was in upheaval. This biblical teaching was pride-crushing. I was laid low in the dust, my soul desolate. But at the same time, these doctrines were God glorifying and Christ exalting. They lifted me up with a sense of awe toward God and filled me with excitement. Joy flooded my being.



These glorious truths ignited a great awakening within me, one from which I have not recovered.

This deeper understanding of God's grace, however, created an enormous dilemma for me. How would the doctrines of sovereign grace affect my preaching? If God is sovereign in salvation, *why* preach the gospel? If I am to do so, *how* do I preach the gospel? *Why* witness? *Why* pray for the lost? *Why* make sacrifices for the gospel? These questions haunted me, especially since I was called to preach. Perhaps they have challenged you.

As I wrestled through these issues, I walked into the seminary bookstore one day to browse among the books. On this occasion, I noticed several volumes of sermons by Charles Spurgeon. Curious, I pulled one off the shelf and began reading. Quite frankly, I was not prepared for what I found. As I pored over the pages, I found message after message dripping with the biblical truths of sovereign grace. But at the same time, each message was on fire with evangelistic fervor, as Spurgeon pleaded with sinners to be saved. Never had I read anything like this. These sermons were like an electric current running through my soul. They shocked my senses and enlightened my mind.

Here is what captivated me. This gifted preacher, perhaps the greatest since the Apostle Paul, was, by his own admission, a Calvinist—Reformed to the core, deeply committed to the doctrines of grace. But at the same time, he was an evangelist. How could these seemingly opposite realities fit together? How could one be both staunchly Calvinistic and passionately evangelistic?

Spurgeon showed me. In one hand, he firmly held the sovereignty of God in man's salvation. With the other hand, he extended the free offer of the gospel to all. He preached straightforward Calvinistic doctrine, then, in the same sermon, fervently urged lost sinners to

call on the name of the Lord. Having expounded the truths of predestination, he then warned his listeners that if they refused Christ, their blood would be on their own hands. In sermon after sermon, this prolific preacher expounded God's sovereign grace with unmistakable precision. Yet, he did it with a genuine passion for the lost.

I concluded that this was what it must look like to be consumed with the glory of God in the salvation of His elect and, at the same time, be filled with flaming zeal in reaching sinners with the gospel. There was no cold, clinical Calvinism here—no dead orthodoxy, no “frozen chosen” religion, no empty rehearsing of Reformed doctrine for people to take or leave as they might choose. Neither was there any shallow evangelism that portrayed God as pacing in heaven, wringing His hands, desperate for someone to accept Him. Instead, here was what the Puritans described as a fire in the pulpit, yielding both the *light* of Calvinistic truth and the heat of evangelistic passion.

In Spurgeon, I saw a historical example of what God was calling me to be and do. I finally understood that my Reformed theology was not a hindrance but a launching pad for evangelism. Here was the best of both worlds. I already had come to see clearly how these twin truths meet in the Bible. Now I could see how they come together in preaching.

Tragically, many pulpits today are pulled toward one of two extremes—the dead orthodoxy of Hyper-Calvinism or the shallow inconsistencies of Arminianism. In the former error, the doctrines of grace are upheld, but with little burden for the lost and no free offer of the gospel to all. In the latter error, there is soul-winning fervor, but the supreme authority of God in the salvation of men's souls is denied. Between these polar opposites stands biblical Calvinism, claiming the high ground in both message and ministry.

In this short book, my intention is to introduce you to the remarkable Charles Spurgeon. My hope is that his example will revolutionize your approach to gospel ministry. May you be emboldened by the gospel focus of Spurgeon, who continues to cast his broad shadow across the landscape of the evangelical church.

Furthermore, I pray that this book will help you gain a proper understanding of the full counsel of God in Scripture. My desire is that you will appreciate the tension between divine sovereignty in man's salvation and fiery passion in spreading the gospel. Only biblical Calvinism does both.

I want to thank the publishing team at Ligonier Ministries for their commitment to this Long Line of Godly Men Profiles series from church history. Greg Bailey, director of publications, has done an excellent job editing this manuscript and encouraging me along the way. Chris Larson was instrumental in envisioning this series and overseeing the beautiful graphic design of this book. I remain proud of my association with my former professor, Dr. R. C. Sproul, and Ligonier Ministries.

I further want to thank Christ Fellowship Baptist Church of Mobile, Alabama, which I serve as senior pastor. I am extremely grateful for the support of my fellow elders and the congregation, who encourage me in my extended ministry. I want to express my gratitude for my executive assistant, Kay Allen, who typed this document, and Keith Phillips, a fellow pastor at Christ Fellowship, who helped edit this manuscript.

Finally, you should know that my family remains a tower of encouragement in my personal life and ministry. My wife, Anne, and our four children, Andrew, James, Grace Anne, and John, stand as one with me in the message and mission of this book.

# Spurgeon's Life and Legacy

*There was no voice in the Victorian pulpit as resonant,  
no preacher as beloved by the people, no orator  
as prodigious as Charles Haddon Spurgeon.*<sup>1</sup>

—HUGHES OLIPHANT OLD

**H**ailed as the greatest preacher of nineteenth-century England, Charles Haddon Spurgeon is arguably the preeminent preacher of any century. Regarded as the most widely successful expositor of modern times,<sup>2</sup> Spurgeon heads virtually every list of renowned preachers. If John Calvin was the greatest theologian of the church, Jonathan Edwards the greatest philosopher, and George Whitefield the greatest evangelist, Spurgeon surely ranks as its

- 
- 1 Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church, Vol. 6: The Modern Age* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2007), 422.
  - 2 Horton Davies, "Expository Preaching: Charles Haddon Spurgeon," *Foundations*, 6 (1963), 15.

greatest preacher.<sup>3</sup> Never has one man stood in one pulpit, week after week, year after year, for almost four decades, and preached the gospel with greater worldwide success and lasting impact than Spurgeon. To this day, he remains “the Prince of Preachers.”<sup>4</sup>

Through the centuries, expositors such as Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli, Calvin, and countless others have committed themselves to preaching in a verse-by-verse style through entire books of the Bible. But this was not Spurgeon’s approach. Though he was “an expository preacher par excellence,”<sup>5</sup> Spurgeon drew his message each week from a different book in the Bible. This free style distinguished Spurgeon from these other great preachers, positioning him, first and foremost, as an evangelistic expositor.

Throughout his prolific ministry, Spurgeon was consumed with a gospel zeal. He made it his practice to isolate one or a few verses as a springboard to proclaim the gospel. He asserted, “I take my text and make a beeline to the cross.”<sup>6</sup> Every time Spurgeon stepped into the pulpit, he set his gaze intently on the salvation of sinners through the proclamation of the saving message of Jesus Christ. As Hughes Oliphant Old notes, Spurgeon was sent “at a particular time to a particular place to preach the eternal gospel for the salvation of souls and God’s everlasting glory.”<sup>7</sup> Perhaps none can compare with Spurgeon as an evangelistic pastor.

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3 Curt Daniel, *The History and Theology of Calvinism* (Dallas: Scholars Press, 1993), 126.

4 Lewis A. Drummond, *Spurgeon: Prince of Preachers* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel, 1992), 277.

5 Ernest W. Bacon, *Spurgeon: Heir of the Puritans* (Arlington Heights, Ill.: Christian Liberty Press, 1996), 77.

6 Spurgeon, cited in Drummond, *Spurgeon: Prince of Preachers*, 223.

7 Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church*, Vol. 6, 443.

Though he deeply loved theology, Spurgeon stated, "I would sooner bring one sinner to Jesus Christ than unpick all the mysteries of the divine Word."<sup>8</sup> He reveled in seeking the salvation of the lost. Here is how Spurgeon described the central importance of evangelism in his ministry:

I would rather be the means of saving a soul from death than be the greatest orator on earth. I would rather bring the poorest woman in the world to the feet of Jesus than I would be made Archbishop of Canterbury. I would sooner pluck one single brand from the burning than explain all mysteries. To win a soul from going down into the pit, is a more glorious achievement than to be crowned in the arena of theological controversy . . . to have faithfully unveiled the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ will be, in the final judgment, accounted worthier service than to have solved the problems of the religious Sphinx, or to have cut the Gordian knot of Apocalyptic difficulty. One of my happiest thoughts is that, when I die, it shall be my privilege to enter into rest in the bosom of Christ, and I know that I shall not enjoy my Heaven alone. Thousands have already entered there, who have been drawn to Christ under my ministry. Oh! what bliss it will be to fly to Heaven, and to have a multitude of converts before and behind.<sup>9</sup>

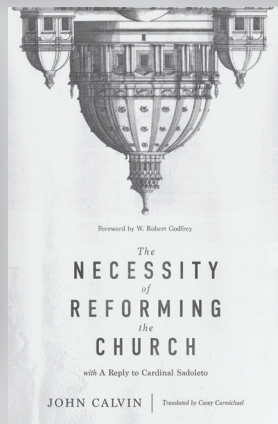
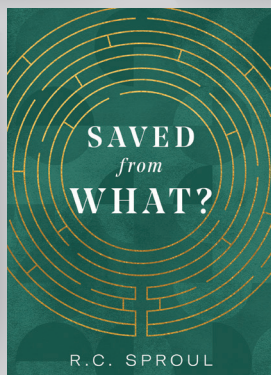
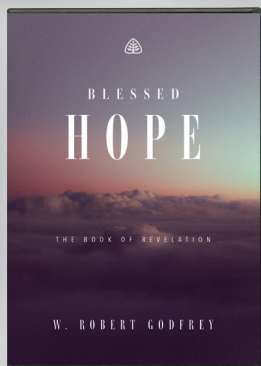
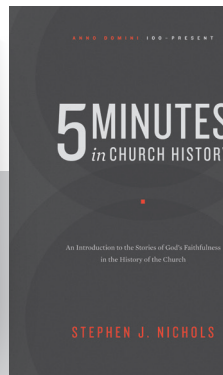
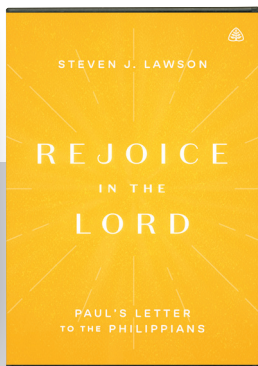
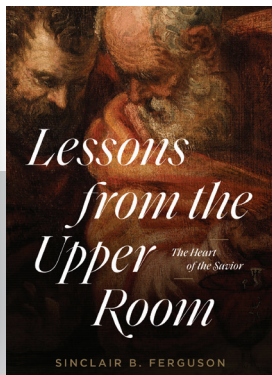
To understand this gospel focus is to feel the very pulse of Spurgeon's heart. To grasp this evangelistic zeal is to touch the live nerve

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8 Charles H. Spurgeon, *The Soul-Winner: How to Lead Sinners to the Savior* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1963), 222.

9 Charles H. Spurgeon, Susannah Spurgeon, and W. J. Harrald, *C. H. Spurgeon's Autobiography, Vol. I: 1834–1854* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1899), 233.

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